

Why Are You Laughing? **(Parallel: Abraham's Future is Ours Series – Part VII)**

10/18/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. What makes you laugh?

This can take lots of directions, but keep pressing for an in-depth exploration of all the things that make us laugh, such as: funny jokes, silly circumstances, absurd situations, disbelief, joy, pleasure, tickling, delight, fulfillment, exuberance, embarrassment, tension, mocking, fear, cynicism,

2. Read Proverbs 14:13. How does this verse describe laughter?

It is an escape; a respite from pain (at least temporarily).

3. Pastor Steve described some laughter as an altered state of mind. Have you ever experienced this?

Laughter therapy is a known field of treating depression and other mental illnesses. It is also well understood that the body releases endorphins when one is laughing with joy and pleasure. One can get caught up in the mood when an audience or group is laughing together. Everything starts to seem funny.

4. Can laughter leave you more vulnerable?

Probably. If the effect of laughter is to relieve tension, then we are in a more relaxed condition, which usually means we are more vulnerable to attack.

5. Read Gen. 17:15-17 and explain as best you can why Abraham laughed.

He was struggling to believe the incredible promise of God to give him many descendants even though he was childless at a very old age. He still worshipped God (fell on his face) and continued to believe, but he had been waiting for a decade and was having trouble dealing with yet another promise that seemed impossible.

6. Read Gen. 18:1-8 and describe the situation. Is this a brief encounter?

The tasks of baking the bread and slaughtering and roasting the calf would have taken hours, so these visitors were there for quite a while. Abraham probably had a long conversation with them about many things not recorded here.

7. What does Gen. 18:9-15 reveal about the various characters involved?

The three visitors would appear to be God in the flesh (Jesus?) and maybe angels or other spiritual beings. The point is that this is a special visitation for the benefit for Abraham and Sarah. The impossible was about to happen and God wanted it be to crystal clear that it was not just an accident of nature.

8. So, why did Sarah laugh?

It seems she is in denial. It's just not possible for her to have a child. The absurdity causes her to chuckle to herself. God makes sure she knows He heard her laugh, but she is not chastised for the laugh.

9. What is the punch line to this entire episode?

"Is anything too hard for God?" He has now waited so long to fulfill His promise that it must be clear to everyone that it would be impossible for either Abraham or Sarah to have a child. Thus, the only explanation when Isaac shows up the next year is that God must have done it.

10. How is the laughter in Gen. 21:1-3, 6-7 different from that seen in earlier chapters?

This is the pure laughter of joy, confidence, & peace. Abraham and Sarah are changed by God's miracle and their faith has been solidified. Clearly, God can do anything. They have named their son Isaac (He laughs), which could refer to God laughing as easily as that they expect their baby to be full of laughter.

11. We end with a comparison of the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. How is their laughter different from each other? Which type describes your laughter?

Ishmael's laughter comes from cynicism, mockery, competition, and anxiety. It is a negative kind of laughter that reflects low self-esteem and uncertainty.

Isaac laughs out of pleasure, joy, and innocence. He has a peace that originates from believing in the God of miracles.

The stronger our faith, the more we are able to laugh like Isaac. Thus, we need to develop our relationship with God such that we trust Him more and more, allowing us to have joy, which strengthens our belief, which allows us to trust Him more. The cycle continues and our laughter becomes contagious.